



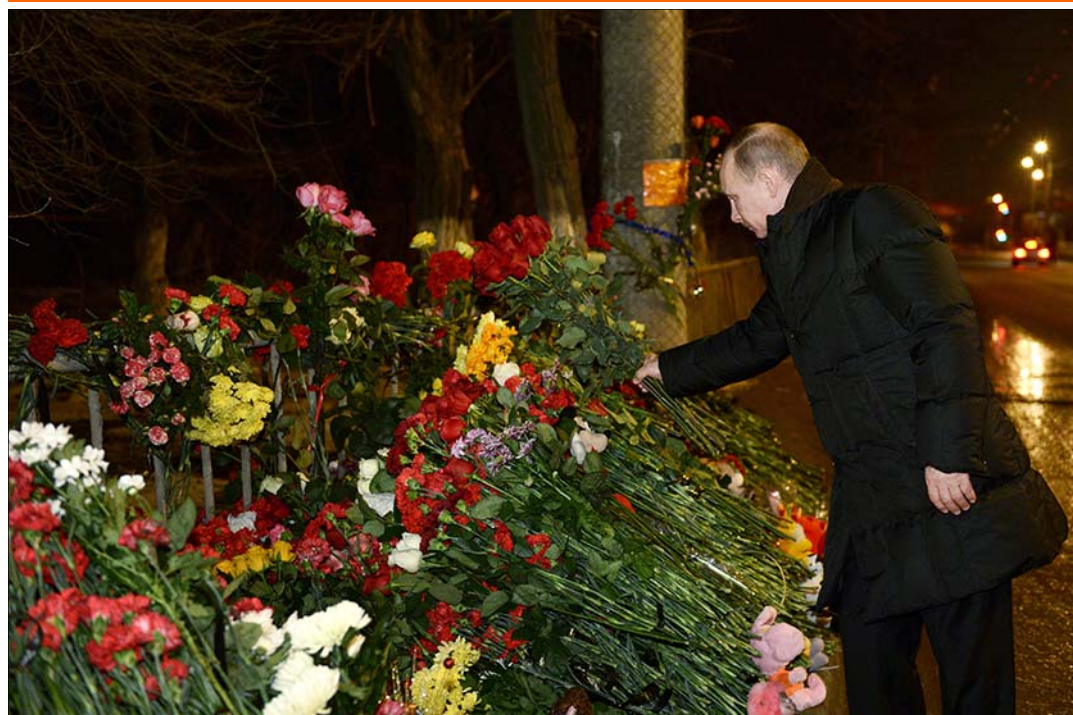
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Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, places flowers where the bomb on a trolleybus exploded in Volgograd (kremlin.ru)

RUSSIA AND ITS NORTH CAUCASUS

Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, travelled to Volgograd on 1st January. Two bombs had exploded in the city over the previous three days. Mr Putin visited the hospital where people injured in the bomb attacks were being looked after. In remembrance of those who died, the president left flowers where one of the bombs had exploded.

Russian investigators believe that sui-cide bombers had set off, or detonated, explosives they were carrying. One explosion was near the entrance to Volgograd's railway station. The other was on a trolleybus, which was travelling towards the centre of the city. A trolleybus is a bus that is powered by electricity from overhead wires. The two bombings killed 34 people. Many more were badly injured.

City officials in Volgograd announced that there would be five days of mourning.

Because of the bombings, New Year celebrations in different parts of Russia were cancelled. Many people in Volgograd left flowers and lighted candles in the places where the explosions happened.

In recent years there have been several similar attacks in Russia. In 2009 a bomb exploded under a high-speed train. The train then derailed, or came off the railway tracks. It was travelling between Moscow and St Petersburg. Moscow is the capital of Russia and St Petersburg is the country's second largest city.

One year later there were two suicide bomb attacks on the Moscow metro. Moscow's metro is one of the world's busiest underground railways. Over 500,000 people travel on it every day. CCTV, or security cameras, had recorded the bombers as they entered the station and got on the trains. Both were women. The explosives were hidden under their

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clothes. In Russia, women who are prepared to be suicide bombers are nicknamed 'Black Widows'.

In 2011 there was another suicide attack. A person detonated a bomb at Moscow's international airport. The explosion happened in the airport's Arrivals Hall. At the time it was crowded with people waiting to meet passengers who had just arrived from other countries.

At first it was reported that the bombs in Volgograd had been detonated by Black Widows. Usually these women are the wives and sisters of Muslim fighters who have been killed. Yet later the investigators said that both suicide bombers were men. Russian officials are sure that all of these attacks were organised by the same Islamic militant group. It is based in a part of southern Russia called the Chechen Republic, or Chechnya.

Chechnya is on the northern side of the Caucasus Mountains. It's what's known as a Russian federal subject. There are 83 of these in total. Each one is part of Russia. Yet some, such as Chechnya, also have their own governments. These are known as republics. Chechnya's population is mostly Muslim.

Two wars have been fought in Chechnya over the last 20 years. These were between Muslim armed groups, which wanted Chechnya to be an independent country, and the Russian army. It's thought that over 100,000 people died in these wars. At the time of the fighting many people accused Russian soldiers of treating local people in Chechnya very badly.

Chechnya has a federal government that supports Russia. Yet militant terrorist groups carry out frequent bombings and shootings. These problems have spread to two other nearby federal republics,

Ingushetia and Dagestan. The populations of these republics are also mostly Muslim. This part of Russia is often called 'the North Caucasus'.

The leader of the group that organised the bombings in Volgograd is called Dokka Umarov. He is 'Russia's most wanted man'. Government officials have offered a reward of US\$5 million (£3 million) to anyone who helps to capture him. Umarov is often described as 'Russia's Osama bin Laden'.



Osama bin Laden was the former leader of al-Qaeda. This is the group that planned and carried out attacks, using passenger aircraft, in New York City and Washington DC, in the USA, in 2001. Ten years later American spies discovered that bin Laden was living in Pakistan. He was shot and killed in a surprise attack in the middle of the night. The attack was carried out by a group of highly trained American troops known as special forces.

Umarov is believed to be the leader of all the Islamic militant groups operating in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. He claims to have set up a new Islamic state in the North Caucasus. Umarov calls it the Caucasus Emirate. He describes himself as its emir, or leader. Nowadays, Umarov is believed to spend most of the time hiding in the mountains. More recently he has encouraged militant groups to attack the

Winter Olympic Games. He calls the games 'satanic dances'.

Like the Olympic Games, the Winter Olympics take place every four years. These games are for all the sports that take place in snow and on ice. They include skiing, skating and ice hockey. The next Winter Olympics are being held in the Russian city of Sochi. This city is on the east coast of the Black Sea, not far from the North Caucasus. Thousands of competitors and spectators, from all over the world, will travel to Sochi for the Winter Olympics. The games start on 7th February and go on for two weeks.

Mr Putin says terrorists, or threats of terrorist attacks, will not disrupt Russia's Winter Olympics. On 7th January Russian officials began one of the biggest security operations in Olympic history.

Over 30,000 extra police and troops have been sent to Sochi. A special security zone has been set up around the city. This runs along the Black Sea coast and 40 kilometres (25 miles) inland. Speedboats will guard the coast and troops are already based in the surrounding mountains. Drones, or unmanned small aircraft, carrying cameras, will fly over the places where all the events are being held.

Most Russians were angered by the bomb attacks in Volgograd. This city used to be called Stalingrad. In the Second World War (1939 – 1945) there was fierce fighting in this part of Russia. Around 1.5 million people, including 40,000 civilians, are thought to have died in the Battle of Stalingrad (1942 – 1943). This battle, which lasted for five months, was the German army's first big defeat of the war. In more recent years Volgograd has become a symbol of both Russia's resistance and its eventual victory. ■

SHARK PROTESTS

On 4th January thousands of people took part in protests in several Australian cities. They were demonstrating about plans to kill sharks near the city of Perth in Western Australia. The largest demonstration was held on one of Perth's beaches.



Great white shark (Terry Gross)

Shark attacks in Western Australia used to be infrequent. Even though there were some attacks the average number of deaths was about one per year. However, some people believe shark attacks are becoming more common. It's possible that this is because more people are now swimming in the sea. Over the last three years there have been seven fatal shark attacks off Australia's western coast.

Last year, officials made a decision to do something to protect swimmers and surfers near Perth. From 10th January, 72 drum lines will be put in the sea. These are floating drums with two lines. One line is attached, or anchored, to the seabed. The other has a large hook on the end. The drums will be placed about one kilometre (0.6 miles) from the shore.

A small amount of dead fish, or bait, is put on the hook. Drum lines are not meant to attract lots of sharks. Instead they are supposed to stop ones that come near the coast from getting closer to the shoreline. The sharks can only sense, or detect,

this amount of bait from a few hundred metres away.

The drum lines will be used between January and April. This is the time of year when most people go swimming in the sea in Australia. Fishermen will be paid to check the drum lines. They have permission to kill any sharks that are over three metres (ten feet) long. The sharks can only be killed if they are caught on the hooks or swimming near the drums.

Types of sharks that grow to this length include great whites, tiger sharks and bull sharks. Adult great whites can be up to 6.4 metres (21 feet) long. They can swim at a speed of 56 kilometres (35 miles) per hour. Great whites hunt, or prey on, fish and seabirds. They do not hunt humans. However, of all the fatal shark attacks most are carried out by great whites. The number of great whites in the world's oceans is not very high. Some researchers even believe that they are becoming an endangered species.

Those taking part in the protests said it was wrong to hunt and kill all types of sharks. They said it would be better to carry out more scientific studies. It may then be possible to work out ways of preventing attacks without killing any sharks. ■

CRACKDOWN IN CAMBODIA

Hundreds of thousands of Cambodian garment, or clothing, workers returned to work on 7th January. Around 600,000 workers from 800 factories had been on strike, or refusing to go to work, since 24th December.

The workers decided to end their strike after the government organised a crackdown on 4th January. Four people were killed and 20 injured. When force is used to stop

demonstrations or protests in this way it is often called a crackdown. The following day the police forced many protesters to leave their camp in Freedom Park. This is a large open area in the centre of Phnom Penh, the capital city. After the crackdown the authorities banned all street demonstrations in the capital.



Kem Sokha (left), Sam Rainsy (centre)

Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy. This means the king is the country's head of state. Yet he has few powers. An elected prime minister runs the country. This person is the leader of the political party that has the most seats in the National Assembly, or parliament.

Elections for the National Assembly take place every five years. The last election was held five months ago. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won 68 of the 123 seats in the assembly. The CCP's leader is Hun Sen. The election result meant that he would be the country's prime minister for another five years. Hun Sen has run Cambodia since 1985. He is one of the longest serving prime ministers in the world.

The main opposition in Cambodia is the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). Sam Rainsy is its leader. At the last election the CNRP got 55 of the Assembly's seats. Mr Rainsy said his party should have got many more. He believes that thousands of votes were deliberately miscounted. Since the election result was announced Mr Rainsy has

been insisting that it be held again, or re-run.

The clothing and footwear industry is important to Cambodia. Large companies in Europe and North America often use factories in the country to make the clothes and shoes they sell. These companies include Gap, Nike and H&M. Each year Cambodia makes about US\$5 billion (£3 billion) from the clothes and shoes it exports.

Before the strike, factory workers in Cambodia were paid a monthly wage of US\$80 (£49). To end their protest the workers demanded that their pay be doubled to US\$160 (£97) per month. Yet the government would only agree to US\$100 (£61). Just before the election Mr Rainsy said that he would double workers' wages if his party won.

Because of the arguments about the election, CNRP supporters set up a protest camp in Freedom Park on 15th December. When the clothing factory workers started their strike many of them joined the CNRP's protest.

After the crackdown Mr Rainsy and his deputy, Kem Sokha, were ordered to appear in court. Government officials accused them of encouraging the factory workers to strike for higher wages. ■

FIAT BUYS CHRYSLER

On 2nd January the Fiat Company announced that it would buy the part of the Chrysler Corporation that it does not already own. This arrangement or 'deal' will create the seventh largest car making company in the world. When one company buys another it is often called an acquisition.

Fiat is based in Italy. The company was started in 1899. In more recent years Fiat has bought other

Italian car making companies. These include Lancia, Alfa Romeo and Maserati. Today, Fiat is the fourth largest car manufacturer in Europe. Fiat cars are made in factories in several other countries, such as Brazil, Argentina and Poland. The company has 215,000 workers. About one-third of them work in Italy.

Fiat has had financial difficulties in the past. However, ten years ago, Sergio Marchionne became the company's new boss. Within a few years Fiat started to make money again. More recently, the company has done well by making smaller cars. These cars, which use much less fuel, are popular in many European countries.



Chrysler is one of the three biggest car makers in the USA. These companies are often called the 'Big Three'. The other two are Ford and General Motors (GM). Walter Chrysler founded the Chrysler Corporation in 1925. The company's headquarters are in the state of Michigan, in the USA. Chrysler makes several different car designs, or models. These include Jeep and Dodge.

In 1998 Chrysler and the German car maker Daimler-Benz agreed to merge, or form one company. Daimler-Benz is the company that makes Mercedes cars. However, the new firm, which was called Daimler-Chrysler, was not successful. In 2007 it was agreed that Chrysler would be sold to a company called Cerberus.

Cerberus is what's known as a private equity firm. These companies raise large amounts of money, which is then used to buy other

businesses. They then try to improve the firms they buy to increase their value. If they succeed the businesses are then often sold to others for a much higher price.

In 2008 and 2009 the 'Big Three' started to lose a lot of money. This was because of the financial problems that began to affect America and many other countries. Nowadays many people call these problems 'the banking crisis'. Starting in 2008 a number of large banks, in both the USA and several other countries, got into difficulties. At this time many people did not want to buy new cars.

The American government agreed to lend billions of dollars to Chrysler and GM. If the government had not provided these loans the companies would have had to close. Soon afterwards Fiat agreed to buy just under 60% of Chrysler. After this the two companies began to work as partners.

The recent announcement means that Fiat will now own 100% of Chrysler. Mr Marchionne said he was very pleased that the American company had now become part of Fiat. In the USA Chrysler will be called Fiat-Chrysler. ■

PANAMA CANAL DISPUTE

A senior government minister from Spain arrived in Panama on 6th January. She had travelled to the country at the request of its president, Ricardo Martinelli. The Spanish minister took part in talks to resolve a dispute, or argument. The dispute is between a large Spanish building company and the Panama Canal Authority.

Before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, ships travelling

between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans had to go round the southern tip of South America, or Cape Horn. The 79-kilometre (48 mile) long canal therefore saved ships a very long, and often dangerous, journey.



A French company first started building the canal in the 1880s. Yet within a few years the company had run out of money. In 1903 the USA bought the rights to finish the work and operate the waterway. Construction work took another 11 years. Over 25,000 workers died during the building of the canal. Most of the deaths were from tropical diseases.

In 1999, after 96 years, the USA handed over the running of the canal to the government of Panama. Since then the Panama Canal Authority has operated the waterway. This is an organisation that was set up by the government. The Panama Canal Authority makes money by charging ships a toll, or fee, to use the waterway. Today about 5% of all the world's trade goes through the Panama Canal.

Over the last hundred years cargo ships have become much bigger. Many are now too large to use the Panama Canal. In 2006 Panama's government made a decision to widen the waterway so larger ships could use it. The width of the locks would be increased by 17 metres (55 feet). This means ships carrying as many as 12,000 containers will

be able to make the eight-hour journey along the canal. Currently, only ships carrying a maximum of 5,000 containers can make the trip.

The number of shipping lanes will be increased from two to three. Officials hope the extra lane will help reduce the large queues of ships that build up at each end of the canal.

Construction companies were asked to tender, or bid, for the widening work. Eventually, the contract was awarded to a consortium or group of companies. A Spanish building company called Sacyr leads the consortium. It includes construction firms from Italy, Belgium and Panama.

The name of the consortium is *Grupo Unidos por el Canal* (GUPC). GUPC calculated that the widening would cost US\$3.2 billion (£1.95 billion). Work began several years ago. It is due to be completed in June 2015. This is nine months later than originally planned.



Ship using the Panama Canal

The Panama government has had to borrow most of the money needed for the building work. It hopes to repay these loans by charging larger ships more money to use the canal.

Recently GUPC announced that there were cost overruns. It claims that it will have to do a lot of extra work to complete the project. GUPC said that the Panama government would have to pay an additional US\$1.6 billion (£970 million). The government refused. It said GUPC

should have included this work when it calculated how much the widening would cost. GUPC then declared that unless it receives the money by 20th January it would stop work, or 'walk away from the project'.

The Spanish government minister said she was sure that the cost overrun dispute could be resolved. ■

IVORY CRUSHED IN CHINA

A special ceremony took place in the city of Dongguan, in southern China, on 6th January. During the event six tonnes of ivory was put inside a crushing machine. All of it was destroyed. Senior officials, diplomats and wildlife supporters attended the ceremony. The event was also shown on television.

Ivory is what elephants' tusks are made of. It can be worth a lot of money. In some Asian countries such as China and Japan, ivory is very popular. In these countries it is carved to make works of art, handicrafts and family seals. Most of this ivory comes from the tusks of elephants that have been killed in Africa.

In 1989 an organisation called CITES (pronounced sight-ees) put elephants on one of its endangered lists. CITES is an international organisation with 178 member countries, including China. Its name stands for the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species. The organisation's job is to make decisions about the trade, or buying and selling, of certain endangered plants and animals. In 1999 CITES banned all its member countries from buying ivory from Africa.

People who kill animals illegally are called poachers. Most elephant poachers are members of criminal gangs. The ban meant that poachers

should not be able to sell any ivory. CITES therefore hoped that it would stop the gangs killing elephants in Africa. Even though the CITES ban has reduced African elephant poaching it has not solved the problem.

Today there are believed to be around 423,000 elephants in Africa. Each year poachers shoot about 25,000 of them. The elephants' tusks are then unlawfully sold and smuggled into other countries.



Items made from elephant tusks (Kate Wong)

Trying to get the poachers to give up is difficult. This is because they can make a lot of money by selling elephant tusks. In China one elephant tusk can be worth around US\$16,465 (£10,000). It is also hard to catch people who buy and sell, or trade, ivory illegally.

In many countries the authorities will now **confiscate** ivory. However, elephant tusks and ivory items from before the 1999 ban are not illegal. CITES hopes that the ban and confiscation of illegal ivory will eventually stop poachers killing African elephants. Nowadays most people agree that items made from ivory are luxuries that are not needed.

Last November around six tonnes of ivory was destroyed in the USA. Other countries such as the Philippines, Kenya and Gabon have also destroyed large amounts of ivory. However, these countries have got rid of all their ivory stocks. The six tonnes crushed in Dongguan was only a small amount of China's

total. Some believe that China has at least another 45 tonnes of confiscated ivory. ■

EARTHQUAKE LIGHTS

Four scientists from the USA and Canada have recently completed a study about a strange **phenomenon**. In the past there have been many reports of colourful lights appearing in the sky before some earthquakes. Nowadays these lights are often called earthquake lights. The scientists now think that these lights are caused by electric charges in certain rocks.

Some reports of people seeing strange lights before an earthquake go back over 2,000 years. However, the lights do not seem to appear before every earthquake.

Many years ago people who said they had seen these strange lights were not believed. However, in more recent times CCTV, or security cameras, and people with mobile phones, have taken pictures of them. For example, in the city of Pisco, in Peru, security cameras recorded a large number of flashes of light in 2007. These images were captured during a powerful earthquake.



Picture of balls of light over Parma, in Italy, taken in 2007, five days before an earthquake struck

In 2008 unusual clouds were seen in the sky over Sichuan province in China. The clouds were coloured like rainbows. A few minutes later a

powerful 8.0 magnitude earthquake struck. It destroyed thousands of buildings and killed 79,000 people.

Another example is the earthquake that badly damaged the town of L'Aquila, in Italy, in 2009. Several people said they saw lights just above a stone road just a few minutes before the ground began to shake. They said the lights looked like ten-centimetre (four inch) flames hovering above the road.

The researchers say that the lights seem to appear in many different shapes and colours. They can be high in the sky or close to the ground. Some look like balls, or spheres. For instance, in 1988 many people saw a large ball of purple light near the St Lawrence River, in Canada. The purple ball appeared 11 days before an earthquake. Other earthquake lights have been described as being similar to lightning coming out of the ground.

When people hear stories of balls of light appearing in the sky some say they must be UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects), or alien spaceships. The scientists suspect that many of these UFO sightings are really earthquake lights.

From their studies the scientists think only 0.5% of earthquakes create these lights. They suspect that the stresses that build up underground before or during an earthquake create electric charges. Yet this only happens in certain types of rocks. The lights are caused by these electric charges bursting out of the ground at high speed.

As well as strange lights there are reports of animals such as dogs, cats, toads and even elephants behaving strangely before earthquakes. Some people think the earthquake light electric charges may also help to explain this unusual animal behaviour. ■

HERORATS IN MOZAMBIQUE

APOPO is an organisation that is based in Belgium. Its name is an **acronym**. In English the organisation's full name is Anti-Personnel Landmines Detection Product Development. For the last ten years APOPO has been using giant rats to find buried landmines in Mozambique. APOPO calls them HeroRATs.



HeroRat with one of its handlers searching for mines in Mozambique

Landmines are types of weapons that are hidden under the ground. They explode if someone steps on them. Landmines are designed to badly wound soldiers. Today, in several countries where previous wars were fought, landmines still cause many serious injuries. The mines may have been buried a long time ago. Yet, when the fighting stopped, they were forgotten about. In some places the people who used landmines could not remember where they put them. Many countries have now agreed to ban the use of landmines.

Mozambique used to be a colony of Portugal. It became an independent country in 1975. However, between 1964 and 1975 armed groups,

which wanted the Portuguese to leave, fought against the authorities. Two years after independence a civil war broke out. The fighting did not finally end until 1992. During these wars thousands of landmines were used in the country. In recent years many local people have been badly injured by these mines.

Bart Weetjens set up APOPO. When he was a young boy he liked to play with his pet rats. At university he became interested in the problem of detecting, or finding, landmines. He realised that rats could be the answer. This is because rats can easily be trained and they have a very good sense of smell. What's more they do not weigh very much. If a rat steps on a landmine it will not explode.

In Mozambique Mr Weetjens decided to use the giant pouched rat. These rats are found in many African countries. The rat's name comes from its pouch-like cheeks. Similar to a hamster, the rat can store and transport large amounts of food in its cheeks. Adult giant rats are about 92 centimetres (36 inches) long. This includes their long tail, which is the same length as their bodies. The rats have poor eyesight but a very good sense of smell.

When detecting landmines the rats wear a harness. These are straps that go around the rat's body. The harness is attached to a long line, or rope. Two people, or handlers, work with each rat. Each holds one end of the rope. When the rat smells the explosives in a landmine it starts to scratch the ground. Another rat is then used to check the same area. Markers are placed to show where the mines are. Specially trained people then carefully dig up the mines and destroy them.

Detecting equipment can be used to find landmines. However, in one

day, HeroRATs can check an area of ground 14 times larger than one person using mine detecting equipment. So far APOPO has found and destroyed almost 2,600 landmines in Mozambique. APOPO believes that it will have cleared all the mines from the country within the next 12 months. ■

ROMAN FOOD SHOPS

A team of researchers from a university in the USA has been working in Pompeii, in Italy, for several years. Pompeii was a Roman city. The researchers have recently presented what they have found. Their discoveries help to explain the diet of people living in Pompeii.

At its most powerful, the Roman Empire covered much of northern and southern Europe, and parts of North Africa and the Middle East. The empire was centred on Rome, which is now the capital of Italy.



Ruins of a temple in Pompeii with Mount Vesuvius in the background (Kim Traynor)

In 79 CE Mount Vesuvius erupted. Pompeii is about eight kilometres (five miles) from the volcano. The eruption buried the city under ash and pumice, a type of volcanic rock. Several nearby towns such as Herculaneum were also destroyed. Poisonous gases and burning clouds of ash quickly travelled down the sides of the volcano. These killed most of the people in Pompeii and

the surrounding towns and villages before the buildings were buried.

Pompeii, which is near the modern-day city of Naples, was re-discovered roughly 400 years ago. Herculaneum was found about 100 years later. Over the last 100 years archaeologists have uncovered large parts of both Pompeii and Herculaneum. As both places were buried so suddenly, many of their buildings are very well preserved.

At the time of the eruption about 20,000 people were living in Pompeii. Today the ruined city is a popular tourist attraction. Over 2.5 million people visit it each year.

The researchers have been working in a part of Pompeii where there were many food shops and restaurants. These places sold different types of food and drink. The researchers studied the remains of waste food they uncovered in the shops and kitchens. They also analysed the waste found in nearby drains and latrines, or toilets. This included burnt, or charred, food, bones and human excrement.

The researchers' studies showed that the foods sold in many of the restaurants and shops included grains, nuts, lentils, olives, fruits, chicken eggs, and locally caught fish. Some of the places were selling meat and salted fish from Spain. Before it was possible to freeze food, things such as fish and meat would be salted to preserve them.

The researchers believe that one of the buildings was a restaurant that sold more expensive food. This restaurant was in the centre of the area in which they were working. In a drain coming from the building they found other types of foods such as spices and shellfish. The spices probably came from as far away as Indonesia.

A bone from the leg of a giraffe was also found in this drain. The researchers suspect that giraffe must have been an exotic food. So far this is the only giraffe bone that has ever been discovered in Roman Italy.

The researchers believe that what they have found out is important. It shows that Roman people living in cities like Pompeii had a much better diet than previously thought. ■

CHEMICAL WEAPONS LEAVE SYRIA

On 7th January the United Nations (UN) announced that the first load, or consignment, of chemical weapons had left Syria. The UN's plan was to remove all of Syria's chemical weapons and stocks of dangerous chemicals by the end of 2013. This was delayed because Syrian officials have had difficulty taking them to Latakia. This is the port in Syria where the weapons and chemicals are to be loaded onto ships.



The first consignment of weapons was put on a Danish cargo ship. It then sailed away from the coast. The ship will return to pick up more chemical weapons when these reach Latakia. A Norwegian ship will also be used to collect weapons and chemicals from the Syrian port. The Danish and Norwegian ships have a military escort. This is made up of warships from Russia, China, Norway, and Denmark.

Syria's chemical weapons are highly poisonous, or toxic, gases. These gases are very dangerous and can kill thousands of people very quickly. Often called WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) the toxic gases can be put inside artillery shells or rockets. They can also be dropped from planes and fitted to both short- and long-range missiles. Under international law it is illegal to use chemical weapons.



MV Cape Ray

The plan to destroy all of Syria's chemical weapons was made three months ago. This was after a chemical attack took place in Damascus, the country's capital city. It's thought that the Syrian army fired rockets into an area of Damascus that was controlled by rebel forces. These are groups that are opposed to Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and his government.

The rockets contained a poisonous gas. Some reports said that at least 1,400 people had died. Many were women and children. The Syrian officials blamed the attack on the rebels.

Fighting first began in Syria nearly three years ago. It has now spread to all parts of the country. So far, around 100,000 people have been killed in the war. Millions of Syrians have moved to Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq to get away from the fighting. Most of these people are now living in refugee camps.

Traditionally, Russia has supported Mr al-Assad. His family has

run Syria for over 40 years. Several Arab nations, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have been giving the rebels weapons and money. Since the war began other countries, including the USA, the UK and France have declared that they want the rebels to win. Russian leaders say helping the rebels will make the problem worse.

After the chemical attack in Damascus the leaders of the USA and France threatened to launch air strikes on several Syrian army bases. This, they said, would be a punishment for using chemical weapons.

Working with Russia, Syria agreed to hand over all of its chemical weapons so they could be destroyed. As part of the plan, inspectors from an organisation called the OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) were sent to Syria. They were shown where the weapons were stored. The OPCW inspectors deliberately damaged certain factories. This was to stop any more chemical weapons from being made.

Last year the American government agreed that an American navy ship would be used to destroy the weapons. Called the *MV Cape Ray* (MV stands for motor vessel) it has recently been fitted with special equipment. Using other chemicals and hot water, the poisons in the weapons will be turned into a harmless liquid on the ship.

After they have been picked up from Syria the weapons will be taken to Italy. They will then be loaded onto the *MV Cape Ray*. The cargo ships from Norway and Denmark will take the less dangerous chemicals to several other countries. There, companies that are allowed to handle dangerous chemicals will destroy them. ■

RED CRAB MIGRATION

Towards the end of each year millions of red crabs begin to move out of the forests on Christmas Island. The crabs walk to the seashore where they mate. The females release their eggs in the sea. Some people say the red crab migration on Christmas Island is 'one of the wonders of the natural world'.

This year's migration began on 27th December. This is later than usual. The crabs' migration starts at the beginning of the rainy season. This normally happens in October or November. However, this year the rains did not arrive until the end of December.



Red crab (John Tann)

Christmas Island is in the Indian Ocean. The captain of a British ship named it in 1643. It's called Christmas Island as his ship sailed past it on 25th December. The island has an area of 135 square kilometres (52 square miles). Much of it is covered by forest.

Christmas Island used to belong to the UK, but is now part of Australia. The island is known for its phosphate mines. This is seabird droppings, or guano, that has accumulated over hundreds of thousands of years. Phosphate is used as a fertilizer. About 2,000 people live on Christmas Island.

There are thought to be at least 30 million red crabs on the island.

Adults have a shell or body that is about 11.5 centimetres (4.5 inches) across. Red crabs are land crabs. They live in the island's forests.

Red crabs dig burrows, or holes, in the ground. For most of the year they stay in the same burrow. The crabs are solitary, which means they live on their own. They eat the seeds, leaves and fruits that fall from the trees.

Each year millions of adult male and female red crabs move from the forest to the seashore and back again. Nowadays officials close many of the island's roads during the crabs' migration. This is so the crabs can cross them safely. There are small tunnels under some roads. Fences are put up to direct the crabs towards these tunnels.

Male crabs usually get to the seashore first. There they dig a burrow close to the sea. When the females arrive they mate. After this the males return to the forest. The females stay in the males' burrows for another two weeks. Then they go into the sea to release their eggs. As soon as this happens the eggs hatch. After releasing their eggs the females also go back to the forest.



Red crabs crossing a road on Christmas Island

The crab larvae stay in the sea for between three and four weeks. During this time they turn into tiny shrimp-like creatures. These creatures then gather near the shore. There, they become very small

crabs. Soon afterwards the small crabs come out of the sea and begin the long walk to the forest. It takes them about nine days to get there. After three years the young crabs become adults. Only the adults take part in the annual 'walk to the sea'.

Over the last 20 years yellow crazy ants have become a serious problem on Christmas Island. The ants are what's known as an invasive species. They may have accidentally been taken to Christmas Island in wooden packing cases. Yellow crazy ants come from Africa. Several other groups of islands have yellow crazy ant problems. These include Hawaii and the Seychelles. The ants do not bite or sting. Yet, in self-defence, they spray a type of acid. On Christmas Island this acid blinds the crabs and they eventually die.

The ants are believed to have caused the death of between ten and 15 million red crabs. A few years ago scientists started working on a project to eradicate, or get rid of, the yellow crazy ants on Christmas Island. Many of the larger colonies, or nests of ants, have now been removed. ■

ANTARCTIC RESCUE

The captains of two ships stuck in sea ice in Antarctica reported that they had managed to break free on 7th January. One of the ships is a research vessel from Russia and the other a Chinese icebreaker. Icebreakers are designed to be able to clear a passage, or route, through sea ice.

The Russian captain explained that the wind's direction had suddenly changed. This had opened up large cracks around both ships. The

two ships' escape from the ice finally ended a rescue mission, which had begun two weeks earlier.

The *Akademik Shokalskiy* research ship had left New Zealand at the beginning of December. In recent years the Russian ship's hull was specially strengthened. This was done to protect it from sea ice. The ship had been hired by a group of scientists. On board were 52 passengers and a ship's crew of 22.

The scientists planned to do some research in Antarctica. They also wanted to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Douglas Mawson's Antarctic [expedition](#). Mawson (1882 – 1958) was an Australian explorer. He led an expedition to Antarctica between 1911 and 1914. His team mapped part of the continent that is closest to Australia. Mawson and members of his expedition also carried out a number of scientific studies. The scientists on the *Akademik Shokalskiy* planned to repeat some of Mawson's observations.



Akademik Shokalskiy research ship

On 25th December the Russian ship became stuck in thick sea ice. It was only a few kilometres from Antarctica. Currently it is summer in the Antarctic. Sea ice of this thickness is very unusual at this time of year. The captain of the ship sent a radio message asking for help.

Two icebreakers sailed towards the trapped ship. Both were already in Antarctic waters. One was the

Chinese *Xue Long* (Snow Dragon) and the other a French ship called *L'Astrolabe*. (An astrolabe is a navigation instrument that was used by sailors and astronomers hundreds of years ago.) However, the ice was too thick. Neither ship could break through to the *Akademik Shokalskiy*.



Xue Long icebreaker

The *Aurora Australis*, an Australian icebreaker, was then ordered to help. It too was unable to reach the Russian ship. By this time the *Xue Long* had also become trapped in the ice. Unlike the other icebreakers the *Xue Long* had a helicopter on board.

A decision was made to use the helicopter to rescue the passengers on the Russian ship. At first the weather was too bad. On 2nd January it cleared, and the helicopter was able to make several trips. It landed on the ice near the Russian ship. The helicopter then took the passengers to an area of ice not far from the *Aurora Australis*. One of the Australian ship's smaller boats then picked them up.

The crew of the *Akademik Shokalskiy* stayed on their ship. Both they and the Chinese crew had large amounts of food and supplies. Plans were then made for larger American and Russian icebreakers to sail to Antarctica. Yet because both the *Akademik Shokalskiy* and *Xue Long* managed to free themselves these icebreakers were not needed. ■

LATVIA JOINS EURO

On 1st January Latvia became the 18th member country of the European Union (EU) to begin using the euro as its official currency. Before this Latvia's currency was the lats. Government officials declared that the lats could still be used in shops, but only until 15th January.

In the past all European countries had their own currencies. In 1992, EU member countries signed an important agreement. Part of this agreement was about them changing their currencies. In future EU members would all use a new currency called the euro. New euro coins and banknotes were eventually introduced on 1st January 2002.

Not every EU member could change to the euro. Only those countries that met certain financial standards could adopt the new currency. Several EU member countries, such as the UK, Denmark and Sweden, wanted to keep their own currencies. They decided not to change to the euro. In Europe the euro is sometimes called the 'single currency'.

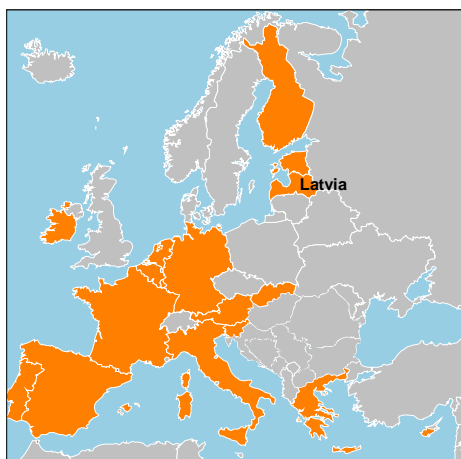


Latvia's new euro coins

Latvia is one of three small European countries that are often called the Baltic States. The other two are Estonia and Lithuania. All three were occupied by Russia at the end of the Second World War (1939 – 1945). They then became part of the Russian-led Soviet

Union. From 1945 until 1991 the communist leaders in charge of Russia controlled the Baltic States.

Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania all became independent countries in 1991. This was soon after the Soviet Union began to break up. All three joined the EU in 2004. Before Latvia, Estonia was the last EU member country to change to the single currency. It did this in 2011. Lithuania is expected to start using the euro in 2015. All the countries that use the single currency are often called the 'eurozone'.



The 18 eurozone countries

Until Latvia became part of the Soviet Union it used the lats as its currency. During the Soviet occupation the Russian rouble was used. After independence Latvia changed back to the lats. So the country has now had three different currencies within the last 22 years.

In all countries that use the currency, euro coins have the same design on one side. Each country can select three of its own designs for the coins' other side. For its euro coins Latvia has chosen the Latvian maiden and two different coats of arms (the lesser and the greater). Most European countries and many cities in Europe have a coat of arms. These are used as their official symbols.

The Latvian maiden used to be on one of the old lats coins before the Soviet occupation. The maiden is on the one and two euro coins. The greater coat of arms appears on the 10, 20 and 50-cent coins. The one, two and five-cent coins have the lesser coat of arms.

In the Latvian language the word 'euro' is quite difficult to say or pronounce. For instance, the word for Europe in Latvian is *Eiropa*. Several years ago the country's parliament said that the euro would be called the *eiro* in Latvia. However, the European Central Bank (ECB) disagreed. It insisted that the currency had to be called the euro. Now the word euro must be used in all official documents in Latvia. Yet people and shops can still call the currency the *eiro*. ■

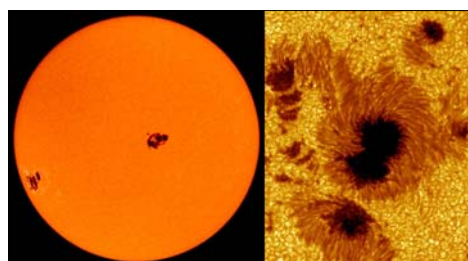
SUN 'TURNS UPSIDE DOWN'

Scientists working at NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) have recently confirmed that the Sun has 'flipped' or 'turned upside down'. Its magnetic field has reversed, so the Sun's north and south poles have swapped places.

This event is part of what's known as a solar cycle. Each cycle takes about 11 years. The 'flip' marks the cycle's midpoint.

The Sun is our nearest star. It is roughly 150 million kilometres (93.2 million miles) from the Earth. It has a diameter of about 1.4 million kilometres (nearly 900,000 miles). This is roughly 109 times bigger than the Earth's diameter. The Sun is vital to the Earth. It gives us light and heat. Without it, our planet would be cold and dark. Nothing would be able to live.

The Sun is made of two gases, hydrogen and helium. Its centre is called the core. Here, the temperature is about 15 million°C (27 million°F). At the Sun's core hydrogen is converted into helium. This produces a huge amount of energy. The energy travels outwards from the core to the visible surface of the Sun. The energy then leaves the Sun as both heat and light.



Sunspots

Closeup of sunspots

The Sun never seems to change. Yet over 150 years ago scientists began recording the appearance of dark patches on its surface. These are called sunspots. The visible surface of the Sun is very hot, but it is much cooler than its core. However, the surface is not all the same temperature. Cooler parts appear as sunspots. These usually occur in pairs or small groups. Sunspots are caused by magnetic activity. They disappear after a number of days or weeks.

The scientists noticed that over the years the number of sunspots increased and then decreased again. They called this period of time a solar cycle. Each cycle lasts for about 11 years. Yet some can be as short as nine years or as long as 14. The scientists looked at old records to see when previous cycles might have occurred. From these they were able to work out that a cycle had begun in March 1755. They called this solar cycle 1.

Today we are in solar cycle 24. It began in January 2008. The magnetic

field reversal marks the midpoint of the current solar cycle. This is when the cycle has its maximum or peak sunspot activity. From now on the number of sunspots will gradually decrease. This will continue for about another five or six years. Then, an increase in sunspot activity will mark the beginning of solar cycle 25. The last solar cycle (number 23) lasted for 12.6 years.

Solar flares are often associated with sunspots. These flares are sudden bursts of energy that erupt from the surface of the Sun. Many solar flares all happening together are called a solar storm.

This increase in the Sun's activity can affect us on the Earth. During a solar storm, the Sun throws out particles that carry electrical charges. These can travel through space towards the Earth. The electrical charges may cause problems with power grids. They can also disrupt satellite communication systems. Even everyday things we all use, such as mobile phones, cash machines, or ATMs, and satellite navigation systems may not work properly. The harmful radiation from solar storms can also be a real danger to astronauts.

Like the Sun the Earth's magnetic field can also flip or turn upside down. Yet this happens over a far longer period of time. The Earth's last magnetic field reversal was about 800,000 years ago. ■

TAIWAN'S BABY PANDA

On 6th January thousands of people queued to see a baby panda at a zoo in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. The panda, which is called Yuan Zai, was born six months ago. Yet this was the first time that members

of the public were able to see it. In Chinese Yuan Zai means 'rice ball'.

Yuan Zai's parents are called Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan. These two giant pandas arrived in Taiwan at the end of 2008. They were sent as a gift from the government of China to the people of Taiwan.

Giant pandas are an endangered species. The large black and white bears are native to China. They live in a few mountainous areas of the country. Chinese officials estimate that there are now only around 1,600 giant pandas living in the wild. About 340 others have been bred in captivity.

Male adult giant pandas can be 1.8 metres (six feet) long and weigh 160 kilograms (350 pounds). Females are a little smaller. In the wild pandas live on their own. They are territorial, or have their own areas. Giant pandas only get together to mate. They spend much of their time eating bamboo. Unlike other types of bear they do not hibernate, or go to sleep, during the winter months.



Giant panda at zoo in Taiwan

Between 1958 and 1982, China gave 23 pandas to nine different countries. The pandas were given as gestures of goodwill from the Chinese government. Sending pandas as gifts to other countries soon became nicknamed 'panda diplomacy'.

Perhaps the most famous example of panda diplomacy was when President Richard Nixon (1913 – 1994), of the USA, visited China

in 1972. At that time the two countries were enemies. Their governments rarely spoke with each other. President Nixon offered to travel to China to meet with Chairman Mao Zedong, the communist Chinese leader. His offer was accepted.

As part of the talks Chairman Mao gave two pandas to President Nixon. The two pandas, called Ling Ling and Hsing Hsing, were kept in a zoo in Washington DC, the capital of the USA. Every year thousands of people visited the zoo to see them.

China and Taiwan became separate countries in 1949. Between 1945 and 1949 there was a civil war in China. The Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, fought the Communists, who were under the leadership of Mao Zedong. The Nationalists were defeated, and retreated to the island of Taiwan.

Both the Nationalists and the Communists claimed to be the official government of China. Even today the official names of China and Taiwan are very similar. Taiwan is the Republic of China and China is the People's Republic of China. China has threatened to invade Taiwan several times. It insists that, one day, the island of Taiwan will be reunited with China.

China first offered a gift of two pandas to Taiwan in 2005. However, the Taiwanese president at that time refused China's offer. Ma Ying-jeou was elected as Taiwan's president in 2008. He decided to accept the two pandas.

Not everyone in Taiwan was happy about the pandas. Some thought that by accepting the panda gift, Taiwan had agreed to become part of China in the future. Others complained about the pandas' names.

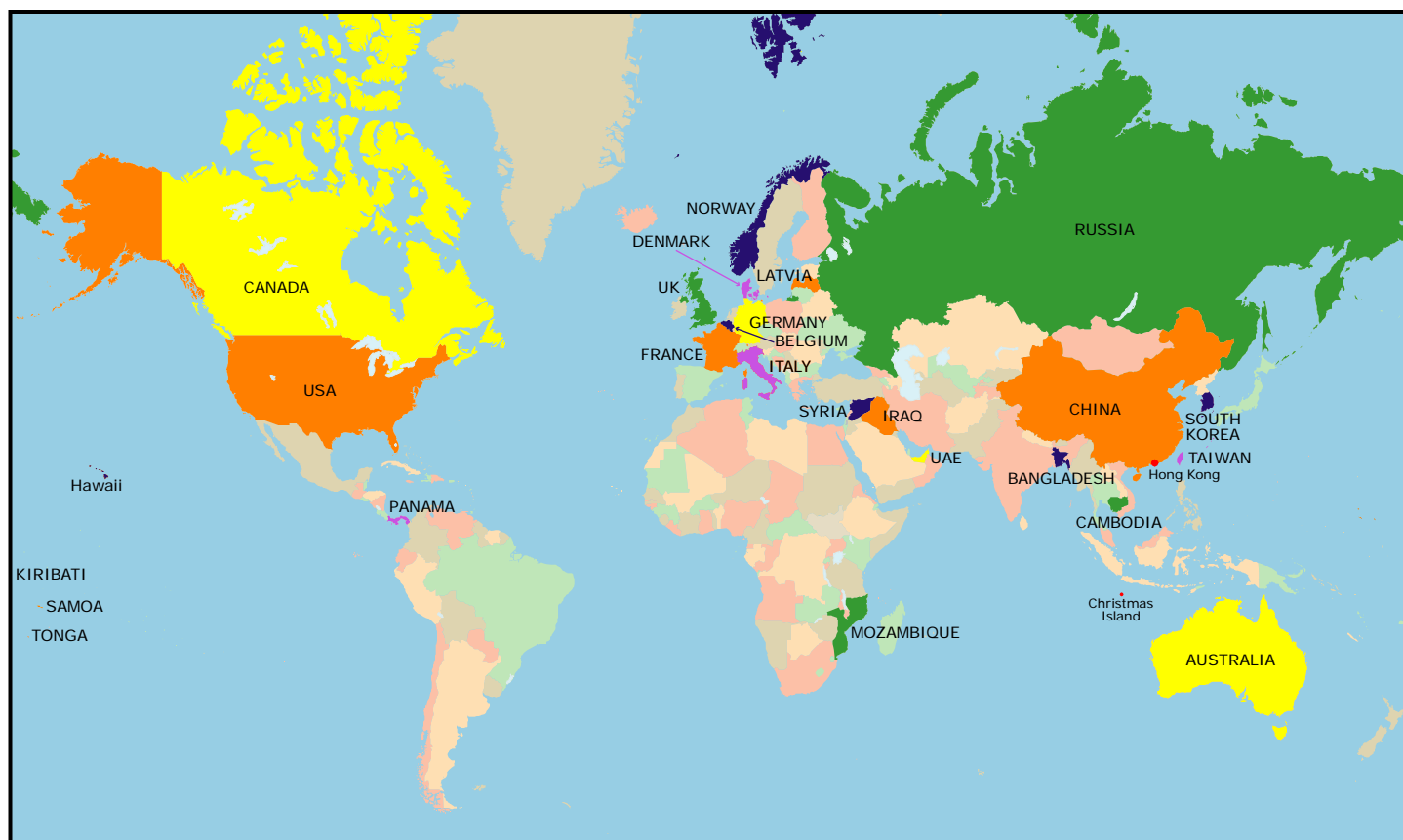
When put together, the Chinese words Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan mean 'reunion'.

It is unusual for a baby panda to be born in a zoo. Officials now expect 19,000 people to visit the zoo every day. However, the animals' keepers have warned that baby pandas like Yuan Zai normally spend most of the day asleep. ■

AK-47 DESIGNER DIES

Mikhail Kalashnikov's funeral took place in Moscow, the capital of Russia, on 27th December. Kalashnikov had died four days earlier, aged 94. He was a former Russian general. Yet he is best known for designing and developing an automatic rifle called the AK-47.

The AK-47 is what's known as an assault rifle. It is light and can



fire single, or groups of, bullets. The bullets are kept in a magazine. Once the magazine is empty it can easily be detached from the rifle. A new full magazine can then be quickly fitted. Even though it was designed over 60 years ago, the AK-47 is still the world's most popular assault rifle.



Mr Putin at Kalashnikov's funeral (kremlin.ru)

The AK-47 has a very recognisable shape, especially the magazine, which is curved. Over 100 million have been produced. There are also many imitations, or copies. Over the last 60 years many revolutionary armies and guerrilla fighters have used the AK-47. Today it is the weapon of choice of many terrorist groups. Russia had a picture of the rifle on one of its coins. It also appears on the flag of Mozambique.

Kalashnikov was born in 1919. His family was very poor. As a young man he got a job in a factory that made tractors. In 1938 Kalashnikov was **conscripted** into the Russian, or Red, Army. Soon after the start of the Second World War (1939 – 1945) he was wounded. While in hospital Kalashnikov heard two other injured soldiers talking. They were complaining about the weapons that were used by the Red Army. He then decided to design a new type of machine gun.

Kalashnikov's first machine gun designs were not accepted. However, senior officers realised that he understood how to design weapons. Kalashnikov was sent to work at a

place where new weapons used by the Russian Army were tested.

In 1946 a competition was held to design a new assault rifle for Russian soldiers. The following year it was announced that Kalashnikov's design had won. The rifle was called the *Avtomat* (meaning automatic) *Kalashnikova model 1947*. The name was shortened to AK-47. Today the Russian army still uses the assault rifle.

The AK-47 has a very simple design. Unlike most other assault rifles it needs little cleaning. The AK-47 will still work if it's covered in sand or mud. What's more the rifle is unlikely to break, jam or get too hot. It's said that during the Vietnam War (1964 – 1973) some American troops would take dead Vietnamese soldiers' AK-47s. This was because they thought they were better than their own M-16 assault rifles.



AK-47

Kalashnikov's grave is in a special military cemetery. This is where most of Russia's past military leaders are buried. Many important people attended the funeral. They included Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, and the leader of the Russian Army.

Some people say that Kalashnikov was responsible for the deaths of more people than almost anyone else in history. On a recent visit to Germany, Kalashnikov was asked about his assault rifle. He said he was 'proud of it, but sad that it is used by terrorists'. ■

COLORADO'S MARIJUANA SHOPS

On 1st January specially licensed shops in the state of Colorado, in the USA, began selling marijuana. Marijuana is a drug that is made from the cannabis plant. The drug is also called cannabis. Colorado is now one of the only places in the world where it is legal to buy marijuana from a shop.

Marijuana is what is known as a 'soft' drug. In most countries buying, selling and smoking marijuana is unlawful. However, nowadays, police forces in many countries do not apply these laws very strictly.

In many countries there are people who argue that smoking marijuana should not be a criminal act. They claim that the effect of smoking the drug is similar to alcohol. In most countries drinking alcohol is not against the law.

However, others disagree. These people believe that smoking large amounts of marijuana can affect people's brains. This, they say, is especially true of younger people. They also argue that people who smoke marijuana are more likely to start using more dangerous, or 'harder', drugs. Examples of these are cocaine and heroin. These types of drugs can be very **addictive**. They can also affect a person's health.

Some years ago a vote was held in Colorado in which all adults could take part. The vote was to decide if people could legally grow cannabis plants and use the drug in their homes. Most people voted 'yes'. So, for the last 12 months it has been lawful to smoke cannabis in your own home in Colorado. However, people were not allowed to sell the drug to others.

Last year another vote was held in Colorado. This was to decide if cannabis could be sold in shops. Again most people voted 'yes'. The new law took effect on 1st January. Cannabis shops have to apply for a special license to sell the drug. So far 136 shops have been given licenses. Most are in Denver, the largest city in Colorado.



Cannabis plants

People over 21 years of age can now buy up to 28.4 grams (one ounce) of cannabis from a licensed shop. They can share this with friends, but are not allowed to sell it.

When buying cannabis people have to show their ID (or identity) card. Smoking cannabis in public is not allowed.

Those visiting Colorado from other states can buy seven grams (one quarter of an ounce) from a licensed shop.

Like many other places Colorado has a problem with drug gangs. These criminal gangs make money by buying and selling illegal drugs, including marijuana. Sometimes drug users do not have enough money to buy more drugs from these gangs. Some drug users start to steal and commit robberies. So the number of crimes often increases where there are many drug users. The police then have to spend a lot of time on drug related crimes.

Smoking cannabis in the same way as drinking alcohol is called 'recreational use'. Some people

believe that making the recreational use of cannabis lawful will save police time. They argue that it will also reduce the number of criminal gangs.

In Colorado cannabis will now be treated like alcohol. So, similar to alcohol, cannabis sold in shops will be taxed. These taxes are expected to raise about US\$67 million (£41 million) in Colorado each year. State officials say much of this money will be used to build new schools.

Cannabis is known to help some people who are suffering from certain medical conditions. For example, it can help to relieve pain. In many parts of the USA using cannabis for medical reasons is legal.

The state of Washington held a similar vote on cannabis last year. There, like Colorado, most people voted 'yes' to making the sale of cannabis lawful. This state will probably allow cannabis shops to open later in the year. ■

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Many towns and cities around the world organised firework, or pyrotechnic, displays late at night on 31st December. These were held to celebrate the start of the New Year just after midnight.

The Earth goes around the Sun once every 24 hours. This means that sunrise or the beginning of each day moves around the globe. Samoa, the Kiribati Islands and Tonga were therefore some of the first places to welcome the start of 2014. In Tonga a bamboo 'cannon' is fired into the air at midnight.

These Pacific island countries are just to the west of the International Date Line. This is an imaginary line

that roughly follows the 180° longitude line, or meridian, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. If you cross this line, the date changes. If you are on the west side and cross it going east, you go from today to yesterday. Yet if you cross it the other way you leap from today to tomorrow.



The Burj Khalifa building during Dubai's record-breaking New Year firework display

The first large city to welcome the start of the New Year was Sydney. This is the biggest city in Australia. Sydney has a large harbour. Around 1.6 million people gathered around the sides of the harbour to watch a huge firework display. Multicoloured fireworks were launched from the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the roof of Sydney's Opera House. These are two of the city's most famous structures.

In Seoul, the capital of South Korea, a bell marks the arrival of the New Year. The large bell is over 500 years old. Traditionally it is rung 33 times.

Hong Kong, in China, is another big city with a large harbour. There, hundreds of thousands of people watched an eight-minute firework display. Many of the fireworks had been placed on a line of barges in the harbour. Others were launched from the tops of some of Hong Kong's tallest buildings.

Dubai had the largest pyrotechnic display. Dubai is the main city

in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The display lasted for six minutes and included 500,000 fireworks. An American company had spent ten months planning the show. Fireworks were launched along 94 kilometres (58 miles) of Dubai's coast. Fireworks also lit up the Burj Khalifa. At 828 metres (2,716 feet) this is the world's tallest building. Afterwards it was announced that Dubai now holds the record for the world's largest pyrotechnic display.

In Berlin, the capital of Germany, the celebrations took place around the Brandenburg Gate. This is a well-known **landmark** in the middle of the city. Over 300,000 people crowded into the Champs-Élysées in Paris, the capital of France. The Champs-Élysées is a famous wide street in the city's centre.

In London, the capital of the UK, the parliament building has a tall clock tower. The clock's large bell is called Big Ben. People in central London count Big Ben's chimes as it strikes midnight. After the last chime the fireworks begin. This year's display was unusual. Peach snow, edible banana **confetti** and orange flavoured bubbles fell from the night sky onto the people below.

In New York, in the USA, almost one million people gathered in Times Square. There they watched the famous 'ball drop'. A large crystal ball on top of a building is released at one minute to midnight. The ball, which is attached to a pole, or mast, moves downwards. It takes 60 seconds to reach the bottom. Then, the fireworks begin.

People in Hawaii were some of the last to welcome the arrival of 2014. This Pacific group of islands, which is part of the USA, is not far from the east side of the International Date Line. ■

BANGLADESH ELECTION

An election was held in Bangladesh on 5th January. However, many political parties decided to **boycott** it. They refused to take part and told their supporters not to vote.

Women lead the three biggest political parties in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina has been the country's prime minister since the last election at the end of 2008. She leads the Awami League (AL). Her main rival, Khaleda Zia, is head of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). The Jatiya Party (JP) is the third largest party. Its leader is Rowshan Ershad.



Sheikh Hasina

Khaleda Zia

An elected prime minister runs Bangladesh. The prime minister is the leader of the political party that has the most members, or seats, in the National Assembly. The country also has a president, who is the head of state. Members of parliament choose the president every five years.

For nearly 20 years either Sheikh Hasina or Khaleda Zia has been the country's prime minister. At least 18 smaller political parties support Khaleda Zia's BNP.

In the past there has often been outbreaks of violence before elections in Bangladesh. Because of rioting by supporters of both the main parties the last election was delayed for two years. Elections for the National Assembly

are supposed to take place every five years.

Since 1991 'caretaker governments' have been running Bangladesh when elections are held. People who are members of these governments are often called technocrats. They are usually important people. Yet they are appointed and not elected. Some people in Bangladesh think caretaker governments are able to organise fairer elections. This is because the ruling party is unable to use its power to affect the election results.

Two years ago the AL passed a law that said caretaker governments were no longer needed when elections were held. Over the last 12 months the BNP, and the many other parties that work with it, have demanded that this law be changed. When Sheikh Hasina refused they decided to boycott the election.

On the day of the election there were many riots. The police said that at least 18 people had died in the violence. Some polling stations, or places where people go to vote, were set on fire.

At the election in 2008 the turnout, or the number of people who voted, was around 70%. This time it was much lower. Many people decided not to vote. They were either afraid of possible violence or they agreed with the boycott.

The boycott meant the AL won easily. The National Assembly has 300 seats. Over half were not contested. This meant in these seats there were only AL candidates and no others. In total the AL won 231 seats.

Other countries and international organisations usually send monitors, or observers, to countries like Bangladesh when there are elections. Their job is to check if the election

is free and fair. Both the European Union (EU) and the USA refused to send any observers.

No one knows what will happen next. Some people believe another election will have to be held. Because of the boycott many say that Sheikh Hasina's new government will have no authority. ■

IRAQ'S ANBAR PROVINCE

Serious fighting has broken out in Anbar province in Iraq. The fighting is between the Iraqi army and an armed militant group. On 4th January the army lost control of Fallujah. This city is about 69 kilometres (43 miles) from Baghdad, the country's capital. There has also been fierce fighting in Ramadi, the largest city in the province.

The group fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi is connected, or linked, with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is the Islamic militant group that organised attacks on the USA in 2001. Then al-Qaeda was based in Afghanistan. The al-Qaeda linked group in Anbar province was set up about one year ago. It is called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS). The Levant is a name used to describe the area around the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Members of the ISIL are also fighting against government forces in Syria.

In 2003 the USA invaded Iraq. Then Saddam Hussein was the Iraqi leader. He had controlled the country for over 20 years. The leaders of the USA accused Saddam Hussein of developing WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction). They insisted that these weapons could be used to attack other countries in the Middle East. The Iraqi leader refused to hand over any weapons. George W

Bush, the American president at that time, decided to launch an invasion. The governments of several other countries such as the UK, Australia and Poland agreed to help.



The invasion was successful and the Iraqi army was quickly defeated. Saddam Hussein was captured and put on trial in an Iraqi court. The court found him guilty of committing crimes against the Iraqi people. He was sentenced to death. In 2006 the USA helped to arrange elections for a new parliament. Nouri al-Maliki became the country's prime minister.

There are two main religious groups in Iraq, Sunni and Shia Muslims. The majority of the population is Shia. Saddam Hussein and most of the people who worked for him were Sunnis.

After the invasion, fighting soon broke out between different Iraqi militant Shia and Sunni groups. Anti-American fighters from al-Qaeda also moved into Iraq. The foreign troops became caught up in the fighting between these different militant groups.

The American and other foreign troops helped to train a new Iraqi army and police force. By the middle of 2009 many of the foreign troops had left Iraq. The last American

soldiers withdrew from the country at the end of 2011.

Many people in the USA and the UK are still unhappy about the invasion and occupation of Iraq. They believe the invasion was illegal under international law. No WMD, which was the original reason for the war, were ever found.

Mr al-Maliki is a Shia. In recent years many Sunnis in Iraq have become angry. They claim that Mr al-Maliki's government treats them unfairly. Most of the Sunnis in Iraq live in Anbar province.

The recent fighting began on 30th December. This was after government soldiers cleared a Sunni protest camp in Ramadi. Now some militant Sunnis are also fighting against the Iraqi army in Fallujah and Ramadi. Since the fighting began there have been several car bomb attacks in Baghdad.

Mr al-Maliki insists that the militants in Anbar province will be defeated. On 5th January, John Kerry, the American secretary of state, said the USA would help Mr al-Maliki in the fight against al-Qaeda linked militant groups. He explained that the USA would send military equipment such as rockets and missiles. Yet no American troops would be returning to Iraq. ■

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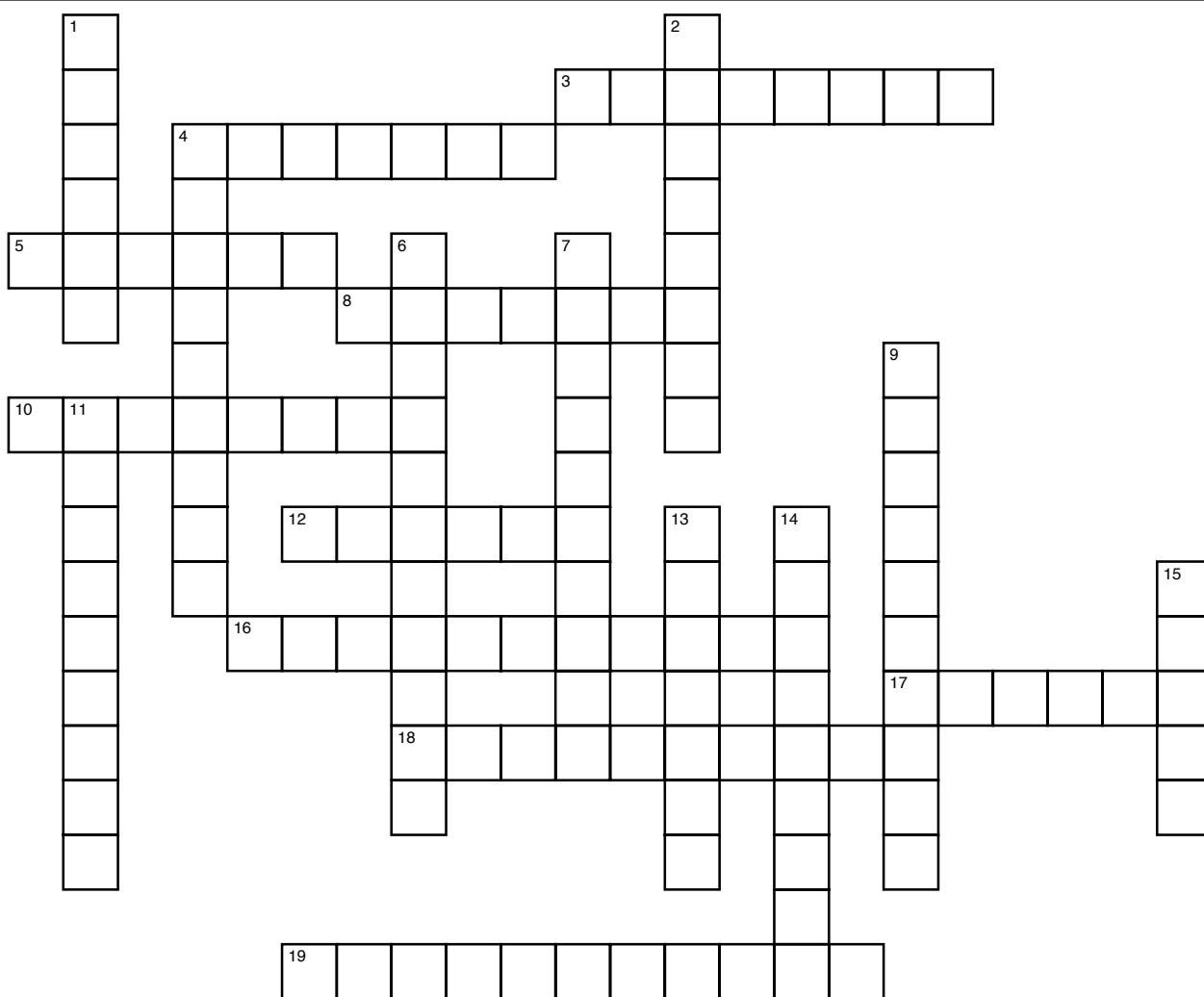
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ISSUE 214

GLOSSARY PUZZLE

INSTRUCTIONS: ① Complete the crossword. The answers are highlighted in orange in the news stories. There are 25 words highlighted and you need 20 of them to complete the crossword. ② Once you have solved the crossword go to the word search on the next page ➡



Across

- 3 Noun** A feeling of being friendly, helpful or kind
4 Noun A word formed from the initial letters of other words, often used as a shortened way of referring to something
5 Noun A girl or young woman who is not married
8 Verb To refuse to use a service, buy something, attend an event or take part in something, as a way of protesting
10 Noun (Plural) Actions done to communicate feelings or ideas
12 Noun (Plural) Boats with flat bottoms that are used for carrying heavy loads
16 Noun A group of companies or group of people that can legally act as a single organisation
17 Noun People or vehicles, usually from the police or military, that travel with an important item or person to make certain it, or he or she, arrives safely
18 Noun Journey for a particular purpose
19 Verb Collected over a period of time

Down

- 1 Noun (Plural)** The state of growth of some insects or fish, when they have hatched from their eggs but are not yet completely developed
2 Noun Small pieces of coloured paper that are thrown in the air on special occasions, especially at a bride and groom at their wedding
4 Adjective Causing a person to become dependent on something, often a chemical or drug
6 Verb Forced someone by law to serve in the armed forces
7 Verb Take something away from someone as a punishment
9 Noun An unusual or remarkable event or occurrence
11 Noun Waste matter discharged from the body
13 Noun The act of deliberately killing oneself
14 Noun Imaginary line running from the north to south poles used for navigation
15 Adjective Very important, necessary, or essential to maintain life

ISSUE 214

GLOSSARY PUZZLE *CONTINUED*

C O N S C R I P T E D N G L S F Q E
 O O S Y V F K Y S G O F O Z E E A X
 N V R Q Z V Z C Y N E N D U G K C P
 F J K P G K D C E L G S V T R F A E
 E O B L O G D M E I A D T T A K O D
 T S F W J R O K T I O K H U B S N I
 T U F O B N A U X J Y C E B R P X T
 I I R Z E V D T R J U K E X U E F I
 L C U H Z E J J I X S A H X P P S O
 C I P U R X V H J O B P C D A Y N N
 A D W R V C X I D U N T T R O C S E
 M E N I Z R M T T O C Y O B O R R O
 L O T C M E K S F C M C I N F N Z W
 L A N I J M P R O H I T T K L U Y Z
 L A R V A E W L L I W D O O G Q A M
 P S E B N N A P R J Q M D R U C V N
 M E M F J T A Y Y I O B M A I D E N
 A C C U M U L A T E D I S K K P J O

INSTRUCTIONS: ③ Find 19 of the 20 crossword answers in the word search. Words can go vertically, horizontally, diagonally and back to front. ④ After finding the 19 words write down the 20th (or missing) word under the puzzle.

Demics are tokens that Individual and Family Subscribers can earn. They are awarded for answering this Glossary Puzzle and/or the Daily News question – accessible by logged in users – correctly. Demics earned can be used by Family and Individual Subscribers in the Newsademic online store.

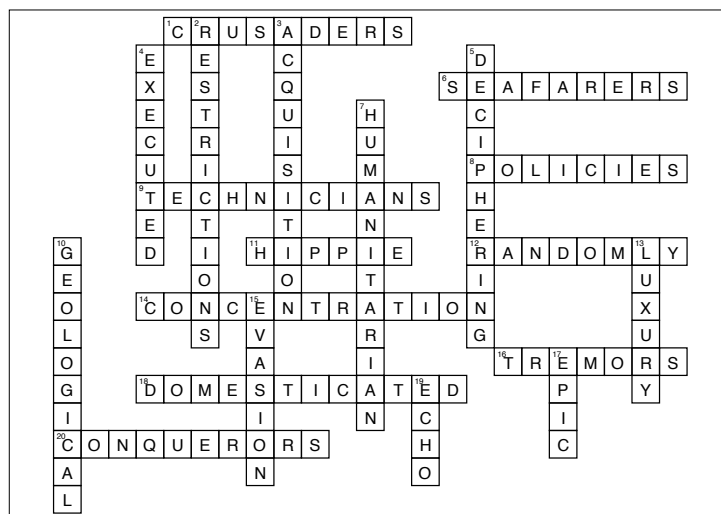


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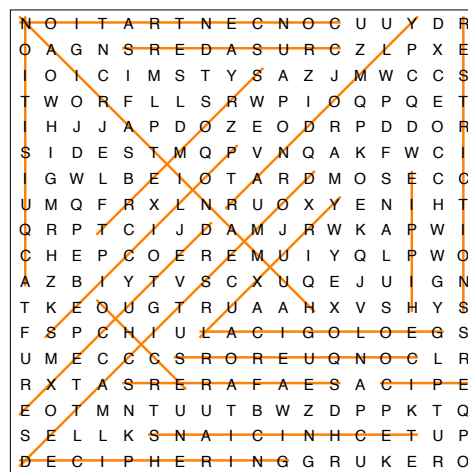
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If you wish to earn additional Demics log in to www.newsademic.com, go to the Prize Competitions area and submit the missing word. Puzzle entries must be submitted by 10 pm on 22nd January 2014 (GMT/UTC).*

MISSING WORD ANSWER =



ISSUE 213 ANSWERS



E V A S I O N